

Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting
Thursday, March 12, 2015, Preston Community Center

Commissioners present: Nate Veranth, forest landowner (Chair), Bernie McKinney, forest landowner (Vice Chair); Dick Ryon, North Bend resident; Rex Thompson, forester; Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe; Daryl Harper, forest landowner

Guests: Gil Bortleson; Amy LaBarge; Ed Kelley; Grady Steere, Hancock Forest Management; Josh Himsl, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

King County Staff: Josh Kahan, Water and Land Resources Division; David Kimmitt, Parks and Recreation; Linda Vane, Commission Liaison

Chair Nate Veranth called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

Motions

Motion 1- 0315 That the minutes of the January 15, 2015 meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff and Agency Reports and Announcements

King Conservation District (KCD) – Dick Ryon reported for Brandy Reed, who could not attend. He said that the KCD is moving forward to develop resiliency and bring on additional staff to put the expanded 2015 work program into operation. They are working on developing their new forestry program and have been collaborating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to help landowners implement projects.

Washington State University Extension– Linda Vane conveyed information provided by Kevin Zobrist, WSU Extension Forest Stewardship Educator. She reported that WSU has initiated a new research project to better understand the motivations and actions of small lot forest landowners who enroll in the Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs), a current use taxation program. The study will show to what degree participation in PBRs changes the way that people manage their forested land. Previous WSU Extension studies have shown that 90% of the people who complete WSU's coached forest stewardship planning course change the way they manage their land in ways that range from noxious weed control, to forest health enhancement, tree planting, and harvest. In addition, said Linda, the WSU Extension has entered into a partnership with KCD to increase the number of coached forest planning courses and workshops offered in King County.

Commission Administration – Linda Vane reported the following items to the commission:

- 100% of commissioners submitted their annual financial disclosure forms on time.
- The King County Agriculture Commission approved the Rural Forest Commission's suggestion that a social gathering for commissioners be held later this year, possibly in the fall.
- Linda thanked the commission for their diligence in always using their county email accounts for Commission business.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – Josh Himsl provided an introduction to NRCS cost share programs. Among other programs, he described the Environmental Quality Improvement (EQIP),

through which the NRCS will pay private forest landowners an incentive to conduct silvicultural practices. Under EQIP the NRCS will also develop a conservation plan for the landowner as part of the service. Josh said that NRCS will also buy agricultural land and wetland easements. In the near future NRCS will also offer focused funding to address regional resource concerns like salmon habitat restoration.

Water & Land Resources Division Protecting/Restoring Land in the Middle Green River Sub-basin
Josh Kahan, Green-Duwamish River Basin Steward, King County Water and Land Resources Division

Josh provided a short introduction to the King County Basin Stewardship Program explaining that the purpose of the program is to protect and restore land in major river basins. Josh said that for the most part he focuses his efforts on the Middle Green River upriver from Auburn and in the White River basin along Boise Creek.

The Basin Stewardship Program is focused on recovery of chinook and steelhead salmon, which are listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, and responding to Washington State studies which have identified the Green River, Newaukum Creek, Soos Creek and Boise Creek as waters of the state that do not meet minimum standards for temperature and water quality, according to Josh. He reviewed the many issues that affect the environmental health of the basin, including noxious weed infestations and lack of habitat for a number of species. Human activities also have an impact on the water quality such as poorly managed livestock damaging shorelines, leaking septic systems, inappropriate clearing of vegetation along streams, he said. The County emphasizes landowner education in addressing these issues and works with the KCD, which offers free technical assistance and cost share grants to help address these issues, he continued. He said that the County also works directly with landowners to revegetate damaged and eroded river and stream banks.

Josh described the County's land acquisition program, which is designed to protect land from development and facilitate habitat restoration. Conservation easements and outright purchase of the land are employed. In choosing sites for restoration and/or acquisition the County's aims to protect aquatic habitat, achieve connectivity of open spaces and create refuges for wildlife. He described a number of the restoration projects that are underway. Many of these lands are in near pristine condition, Josh said. When restoration is required, the County partners with non-profit organizations such as the Green River Coalition and agencies such as the KCD and NRCS on restoration projects and Washington Department of Natural Resources on acquisitions.

The County uses a scientific, ecological approach to identify the most ecologically important wetlands, streams, rivers, bogs and open water habitat. This is typically no more than 2 to 3% of the land area in a basin. The timeline is 50 to 60 years. Josh said that the open space system is maintained, monitored and managing by the Parks Division. Parks is currently updating their long range plan to fund management of these open spaces in perpetuity, according to Josh.

Josh concluded the presentation with slides showing the variety of aquatic habitats and forested open spaces in the Green River Basin. There was an extensive discussion of factors that affect water quality and stream temperatures.

King County Comprehensive Plan Update 2016
Linda Vane, Liaison for the Commission

Linda provided an introduction to the King County Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) update process. She described the structure of the plan, the purpose of the comprehensive plan, and how the Comp Plan works with the Countywide Planning Policies and other county plans such as the Countywide Strategic Plan.

She provided examples of the way that policies relate to regulatory changes. She also reviewed the purpose of the 4-year major update cycle and the mechanics and timeline of the update process. Following the presentation, the Commission brainstormed a list of potential policy areas to consider when reviewing the Comp Plan policies during the coming months.

The Commission asked staff to set up a SharePoint site for use by the commissioners during the Comp Plan update process.

Public Comment

Ed Kelley and Gil Bortleson provided comments on the Comprehensive Plan update.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on May 14, 2015, at the Preston Community Center.

Staff Liaison: Linda Vane, at 206-477-4842 or linda.vane@kingcounty.gov